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# Negative Perception of Sexuality in Advertising And the Counterarguments or Solutions to These Reactions

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# Negative Perception of Sexuality in Advertising

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## Introduction

From movies having explicit sex scenes to teen pregnancy becoming a hot topic, sexuality is a part of media. It has also become popular in the advertising market as a new “it” factor, attempting to draw in consumers with nudity and innuendoes.

Yet despite its presence in media, sexuality in advertising can cause negative consumer perception, decrease brand recall and prevent women from buying a product. Luckily for advertisers, however, all of these negative effects can either be prevented or offset. If the product at hand has a pre-existing sexual connotation, there is no worry about the advertisement being viewed negatively. While brand recall is decreased due to sexuality, the attention paid to the advertisement is increased and while women dislike sexuality, sexuality in the context of a relationship increases the positivity of a woman’s views.

## Aim

In “Does Sex in Advertising Work?” by Tom Reichert, there are promises embedded in sexual advertising, such as enhanced “sexual opportunities and satisfaction from those encounters, and enhanced feelings of sexual self-confidence.” This essay analyzes why multiple negative effects occur as a result of sexuality in advertising and aims to find how to prevent them in order for brands to better create advertisements where sexuality adds something, as Reichert claims it should, instead of taking it away.

## Acknowledgements

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## Inserting Sexuality into a Non-Sexual Brand/Product

In “The Effect of Personality on Response to Sexual Appeals,” Black, Organ and Morton respond to this by suggesting that “care is required when using these appeals for products with no pre-existing sexual connotations” (1453-1454). A lack of connection between sexuality and a product or brand has been shown to...cause consumers to perceive the product in a negative manner (1458). This is important to note because if consumers view an advertisement negatively they are less likely to purchase said object.

## Sexuality in Association with Products That Have Pre-Existing Sexuality

Two researchers, Peterson and Kerin, “tested three levels of female nudity in ads for body oil (congruent) and a wrench set (incongruent) on a set of ad effectiveness measures” (Reichert). It was found that when consumers rated the advertisements, the body oil advertisements received better ratings, even when the explicitness of the advertisement increased as well (Reichert). Reichert asserts that the findings from this study “indicate that relevance between sexual content and product-type can influence evaluations of ads and brands. The closer the link between sexual content and the product, the more favorable the evaluation.”

*This connects directly to brands such as Victoria's Secret. Victoria's Secret has the pre-existing connotation of sexuality, so less work is required to make the sexuality to work positively for the brand.*



## Women Do Not Favor Sexuality in Advertising

In “Psychophysiological and Cognitive Responses to Sex in Advertising,” Belch, Holgerson, Belch and Koppman assert “...women view ads with female models at [all] levels of nudity and suggestiveness as less interesting, less appealing, and more offensive than do males.” This was increased as the sexuality became more overt (Belch, Holgerson, Belch and Koppman). In this sense, an advertisement with an extreme level of nudity would not only be seen as less interesting by women but could also go as far as to be seen as offensive. This would prevent a woman from buying the product and possibly even other products from the same brand in the future. This is especially important for advertisers to recognize, since the main consumers in most households are women.

## Women Respond Better to Sexuality in Relation to a Relationship

If there is a relationship between two models present in a sexual advertisement, women are more likely to respond positively to the advertisement. This in turn would mean that female consumers would be more willing to buy the product being advertised.

In “Sex in Advertising: Gender Differences and the Role of Relationship Commitment” Dahl, Sengupta and Vohs assert that “women's attitudes should be improved if the sexual image can be understood in the broader context of a committed relationship, rather than inferring that the image promotes wanton, recreational sex” (218).



*Kay Jewelers implies that kisses, or something more sexual, result due to their products. Yet these products are usually given between those in a relationship, making women respond well to the implied sexuality.*

## Brand Recall of an Advertisement with Sexuality

Reichert asserts that sexuality in advertising enhances thoughts about the sexuality in an advertisement, while decreasing the thoughts are being directed toward the product information (Reichert). Viewers think more about the sexuality than the brand information, possibly decreasing brand recall (Reichert). This is important to note because in most cases, brands would want consumers to recognize the informational content in the ad just as much as the visual content.

## Sexuality Draws Attention to Brands and Products

In “Does Sex in Advertising Work?: A Review of Scholarly Research Informed by Professional Opinion” Reichert asserts that “many people consider an advantage of sex in advertising its ability to get noticed. An old saying within the business is that an advertiser can always attract attention with...pictures of ‘babies, beagles, and bosoms,’” implying that sexuality – along with babies and puppies – is a surefire way to attract consumer attention within an advertisement.

## Conclusions

The perception of sexuality by consumers has been readily researched by psychologists and media experts to find what is most and least effective in advertising. This type of research deals with memory, perception, physiological reaction, and even cognitive perception. This culminates in this research in order to better find how to make sexuality in advertising more effective and offset or prevent negative effects.

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